

Citation for published version:

Watermeyer, R 2016, '(Re)Theorising global knowledge flows', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 481-487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2016.1141592>

DOI:

[10.1080/01425692.2016.1141592](https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2016.1141592)

Publication date:

2016

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *British Journal of Sociology of Education* on 2 Apr 2016, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/01425692.2016.1141592>.

University of Bath

Alternative formats

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Extended Review:**Globalizing Knowledge: Intellectuals, Universities, and Publics in Transformation.**

British Journal of Sociology of Education

Richard Watermeyer – 06.01.15

Kennedy's 'Globalizing Knowledge' is an odyssey into the sociological complexity of knowledge in the milieu of continuous and often rapid change to the conditions, structures, designs and framings of its production. At its core is an attempt to unpack and problematize the processes and persons involved in the pursuit of new knowledge and the heterogeneous and sometimes antagonistic intentions and rationalizations for being so and thereafter the impact of such collusion. It is an attempt not necessarily at rearticulating but extending the articulation of the knowledge jigsaw that elucidates how and why an inter-connected though not always cohesive and explicitly composite 'public' or myriad 'publics' navigate, make sense of and draw utility from the manifold experience of knowledge. The book challenges its readership to (re)consider the rubric of knowledge from the point of knowledge being a form, in a Bourdieuan sense, of 'capital' or from a Foucauldian perspective, 'power' that is at once transformative for those participating in its production and co-option and is yet that which is concurrently transformed by the intervention of its producers and users.

Kennedy asks his reading 'public' to join his own thought- journey through the maze of meanings of knowledge in the contemporary landscape of a detemporalized or be that digitally emancipated (or conversely incarcerated) relational matrix of knowledge stakeholders. He attempts to draw a relational map or pathway through the kaleidoscope of meaning and value ascribed to knowledge by its different stakeholders and actors. Central to his cartographic work is a concern with the efficacy of knowledge as a catalyst of social, empowerment, justice and equality and the extent to which the accelerating porosity of the world's knowledge borders and the proliferation of open networks stimulates the democratization of knowledge.

In its conceptualisations of knowledge as power, 'Globalizing Knowledge' focuses on the governance of the distribution of knowledge and the manner in which knowledge 'flows' or finds its flow disrupted or inhibited according to the motivations of those who claim its ownership. In this, Kennedy considers how claims of ownership of knowledge are radicalised by the diaspora of intellectuality and where it has been seen to escape the quarantine and confinement of the Academy and seeped or perhaps, rather, streamed into the public realm. Kennedy comments on the manner in which knowledge is no longer exclusively the inheritance of educated elites inhabiting, in blissful seclusion, ivory towers of power and prestige. These are seen to have been crow-barred as a consequence of political

necessity, not least where democratic virtues of transparency and accountability are sought and policed, and economic fundamentalism where the production of knowledge is increasingly rationalized in the terms of its monetaristic contribution. Kennedy accordingly draws attention to the opening-up of knowledge, symbolized not only with the advance of information and communication technology but the collapse of its right to claim and the pluralization and diversification of its landlords. In essence, the rights to the production of knowledge are redistributed and essentially, released from the grasp of the university, which as the previous general of a knowledge empire, cedes its claims of ownership and decolonizes its knowledge territories. The effect of this sharing of knowledge rights and control is a reimagining of the role of the university and of the intellectual as the engine and cog of knowledge production. Concurrently, where knowledge is 'emancipated' the role and contribution of the public must be reconsidered and ostensibly elevated.

The point being made is that whilst knowledge gains greater mobility, the responsibility of the greater number of those who wield it becomes more diffuse. However, as Kennedy alludes, the potency of knowledge as an iteration of social capital potentially wanes – the ubiquity of its right to access, effectively lowering its stock. Notwithstanding, questions as to who owns not knowledge but the rights of access to knowledge and the authority – in the context of constitutional power and/or moral citizenship – to prioritize its use and exploitation (most often in a capitalist sense) are thrown wide open. To understand the ownership and therefore behaviour of power in a global context begins then with understanding the identity and interface of the actors, institutions and networks through which it travels and spreads. We might think of this as the public or *republic* of knowledge. This then is precisely the mission of Kennedy's book – an attempt to chart the way the various conduits of knowledge, as Kennedy (p.10) puts it himself '... shape and are shaped by, the mediations of various global flows'.

Kennedy achieves this by considering the materialisation of the public – or the republic of knowledge – as a communicative assembly and consequently the fulcrum from which global transformations are mobilized and returned. The globalized public is a multifarious and essentially undefined or amorphous community, constituted, as Kennedy suggests, adopting the thinking of Bruno Latour, of social actors communing and resisting within a network of relations. Within the network, knowledge may be seen to crystallize at points where the context, framing, design, or perhaps capital of its carriers and protagonists are perhaps most pronounced or discernible. The university ostensibly offers one such site or focal point within the network.

Within the book, Kennedy focuses upon how a global knowledge network causes mutations in the subjectivity and performance of its citizens (and patrons). The university as one such collective of knowledge citizens or knowledge workers operating within the global network is accordingly described as undergoing significant change as it attempts a cultural transition from being inwardly interested to outwardly conscientious. This institutional transition of

course has significant implications for what is interpreted and performed as intellectual practice, intellectual worth, intellectual autonomy and criticality. The university's engagement with its publics is, therefore, as Kennedy sees it, cause to debate the role of the intellectual and her potential reconfiguration or reduction as a 'professional' and/or an operator within a public network, which in many parts of the world, the USA and UK especially, is being aggressively marketized. Kennedy takes this kind of reductionism further by considering the emergence of the celebrity intellectual and the displacement of a traditional association of intellectuality. The celebrity intellectual – analogous with public intellectual – is presented by Kennedy in the forms of serious entertainers like Michael Moore or Jon Stewart or as more visible, publicly facing, populist or accessible intellectuals like Noam Chomsky or Naomi Klein. Kennedy points here to an interesting parallel in the construction of what 'counts' as knowledge and that the governance of what is perceived to count as knowledge is the same both within and outwith the Academy, where dominated by performance tables or lists. Such constructs are seen to extend the value of knowledge and the conduits through which it travels and the same time as signposting to the less knowledge literate, which informational resources are best.

A substantive focus for Kennedy is how global forces are challenging the orientations and priorities of the university as they respond to global league tables that convey most frequently research prestige and status, but also their role as chaperones of youth and partners of business and industry. Kennedy here draws on the work of Lewis Coser, Jonathan Cole and Michael Burawoy to consider the evolution of, challenges to and contradictions of the 'neoliberal' university as a site of knowledge production that appears, primarily on account of the supremacy of fiscal rationalization, to find its public role obfuscated and/or subjugated by private interests. Kennedy acknowledges the emergence of a relatively recent phenomenon of critical studies of universities that focus on how a globalized and fiercely competitive market economy of higher education is challenging the nature and function of scholarship and the prioritizations of knowledge production. In the latter context especially, Kennedy points towards how the acquiescence of universities to market needs – and their own survivalist response to global competition – is causing the corrosion of the very idea of a university from an institution that is perhaps almost uniquely and intentionally detached from 'public' (interchangeable with political) interference, and consequently positioned to produce critically objective knowledge, to a knowledge 'factory' fulfilling a narrow and highly instrumental function defined by its patrons and clients. Such a shift in the ideological and operational basis of universities is central to Kennedy's discussion of legitimation in intellectual life and provides traction towards a theory of universities in crisis - promulgated vigorously by the likes of Burawoy.

In a chapter that addresses the nature of engagement in knowledge contexts, particularly those focused on a fusion between publics and the intellectual community or in other words those characterised by a new political mandate for openness and transparency in the scientific realm, Kennedy points towards how a rearticulation of higher education is given

further impetus by the effective mobilization of invested publics or publics enacting responsible citizenship. These publics are shown by Kennedy – with the excellent example of the Occupy movement – to display qualities of critical agency, freedom, agility and a certain kind of robustness, hewn from their critical solidarity and (quasi)immunity from the diktat of political and economic elites, now seemingly out-of-reach to their university counterparts. These critical publics or what Michael Warner would call, ‘counterpublics’ are therefore key commentators and activists operating in the defence of a traditional Enlightenment idea of knowledge – and coterminously a traditional Mertonian idea of scholarship – and/or dissidents protesting the corporatization of knowledge and the usurpation of knowledge institutions, like universities, by global corporate interests. By drawing attention to the agency of counterpublics and their potential potency as intellectualists, Kennedy reminds his readership that university intellectuals can no longer claim sole jurisdiction as critical commentators or activists of the public sphere. They are instead challenged to reconsider their relationship with the public and the authority of the public as a co-conspirator:

Let us dispense with that notion of the global public as an invisible passive receptacle into which the wisdom of the elite is deposited. Let us pluralize that public and reconceive it as a partner for posing problems, figuring methodologies and developing knowledge consequences. (p. 155)

Kennedy’s account of global knowledge and its flows is, in my reading at least, an implicit nod to Bauman’s conceptualisation of liquid modernity and a distinction of contemporary life as always moving, perpetually in flux. So too then is the arrangement of knowledge, where publics or those assumed to exist outwith a (formalized) knowledge sphere are shown to be proficient knowledge organisers and producers. It is with recognition of this ephemeral state that Kennedy calls into question so much of what the intellectual community has established as its knowledge habitus, edifice and/or sanctuary: the university, the disciplines and the dense ritualism that demarcates and is seen to preserve intellectual life. In so doing, Kennedy reflects not only upon the dissipating centrality of the knowledge institution in ordering knowledge production but the wider spatial terrains of knowledge production. More specifically he considers the widening contours of national geographies as potentially loosening or conversely, calcifying determinants of knowledge foci. He challenges the ethnocentrism analogous with the production of knowledge in higher education settings, in developed countries especially, where institutions ‘organized around global relations of power and privilege’ (p.192) define the nature and trajectory of knowledge flows. In other words, the ‘true’ globalization of knowledge depends upon the capacity of varying (national) contexts to universalize their indigenous knowledge foci rather than have these suffer disqualification due to the communicative influence of other more powerful and/or hegemonic knowledge contexts. Simply put, Kennedy reminds us that the globalization of knowledge does not automatically correspond to the equal and harmonious participation and interplay of global partners. Consequently, where knowledge is being

globalized it is at once being democratized – as might be the case with public activism - and yet conversely sequestered – as exemplified in the power imbalance between nation states.

Kennedy furthers this notion of unevenness and/or selectivity in the course of global flows referencing the way with which performance art and issues affecting the distribution and ownership of energy impacts upon a global knowledge community and the kinds of solidarity necessary in the advancement of alternative and ameliorative futures. In the specific context of performance art and the example of the Russian female punk outfit, 'Pussy Riot', Kennedy articulates the power of the image in ways redolent of Marshall McLuhan, and the way with which image, transported through global knowledge flows potentially stimulate the production of solidarity and alternative, anti-hegemonic communities. As previously in the book, Kennedy draws attention to the power of global digital networks in transporting, recreating and recycling knowledge and intimates therein the manner of knowledge distribution and consumption across various contexts (sites of origination and sites of appropriation). He also charges his readership to more assiduously consider the contextual basis and or 'cultural landscapes', that inform such flows and the translational processes that cause their continuation and potential deviation by being co-opted into other cultural landscapes and knowledge networks. This demands, Kennedy seems to suggest, using the example of public debates over energy, an ability to exercise critical independence and non-partisanship in the adjudication of knowledge claims and furthermore a capacity to interface with knowledge claims, directly. He argues for a need to resist the diversions of other ostensibly grander ideological frames that can dominate discussion and 'defy and deny challenge' (p.220).

In better understanding the identity and behaviour of knowledge producers and the potential for their wider connectivity with other users and collaborators, Kennedy looks to knowledge networks as (formal and informal) congregations that might 'reflect better than universities the identities of their members and the visions of knowledge and change those network participants embrace' (p.229). The network might also, he argues, be a more potent means to mobilizing (and democratizing) knowledge in pursuit of the public good because of the flexible and communitarian terms of its membership and the expectations made of it. The success of the network, Kennedy suggests, is built upon the strength of its membership – and of course, it's distinction – in solving a scientific problem, less institutional need. The network consequently appears in Kennedy's terms a more purer and less complicated platform for the articulation and 'design' of knowledge. The network is, however, threatened by the volatility and vagaries of knowledge shifts and trends that would surely appear to characterise the nature of global flows. The network itself is a community at risk and of constant change not least where knowledge flows and the transformations they engender redraw its purpose; change the commonality; or enhance the cosmopolitanism of its membership – fluctuations Kennedy considers integral to the formation and framing of knowledge. His overall or most pervasive sentiment that encapsulates so much of what the book contends with in discussing knowledge flows and

their global interconnectivity has to do with an assertion that, 'the foundation for globalizing knowledge rests in the ability to recognize those and their knowledges beyond the worlds we comfortably inhabit' (p.299). This would it would seem demand a sociological eclecticism or catholicity in making sense of and consequently engaging knowledge flows in a project of social betterment.

Kennedy ends the book by focusing on what he describes as eleven theses on globalizing knowledge. A synthesis of these reflects a concern and commitment to 'understand the place of knowledge in our world today', which, 'given the conditions of its transformations, demands far more intellectual engagement if only to understand better what we mean by autonomy for its producers' (p.315). Such understanding, Kennedy suggests might be contextualized and guided according to an awareness first and foremost that the globalization of knowledge refers not only to its irrepressible spread but that the march of its digital invasion heralds profound intellectual and institutional transformations. Of these transformations, changes in the organisation of intellectual life; its institutions; and its relationship with its public is arguably most profound and yet also most sociologically complex. Criticality and reflexivity are imperative conditions then both of scholars and their publics in realising a deeper and more meaningful conversation concerning the impact of global flows. This might then, as Kennedy opines, lead to a more penetrative and potent visualization and opportunity from which to find clearer orientation through the challenges and terrain of globalized knowledge and instigate a platform from which to more fruitfully exploit its transformative potential. Further investment and momentum in critical sociologies of higher education, of which in essence this book is one, presents one such vehicle in achieving this kind of necessary progress.